

# **JAMAICA 2013 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT**

## **Executive Summary**

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom.

There were reports of societal discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Rastafarians reported that the overwhelmingly Christian population discriminated against them, although there were some reports of increasing acceptance.

The U.S. embassy discussed religious freedom with the government and with civil society.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 2.9 million (July 2013 estimate). An estimated 26 percent of the population belongs to the Church of God, 12 percent is Seventh-day Adventist, 11 percent Pentecostal, 7 percent Baptist, 3 percent Anglican, 2 percent Roman Catholic, 2 percent United Church, 2 percent Methodist, 2 percent Jehovah's Witnesses, 1 percent Moravian, 1 percent Brethren, and 2 percent did not report. Other religious groups constitute 8 percent of the population, including approximately 29,000 Rastafarians, 1,500 Muslims (although Muslim groups estimate their numbers at 5,000), 1,800 Hindus, 500 Jews, and 270 Bahais. The census reports that 21 percent has no religious affiliation.

## **Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom**

### **Legal/Policy Framework**

The constitution and other laws and policies generally protect religious freedom.

Parliament may act to recognize a religious group; however, registration is not mandatory. Recognized groups receive tax-exempt status and other privileges, such as the right of their clergy to visit members in prison.

Religious schools are not subject to any special restrictions and do not receive special treatment from the government. Most religious schools are affiliated with

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either the Catholic Church or Protestant denominations; there is also at least one Jewish school and at least two schools run by the Islamic Council of Jamaica.

The government prohibits the use of marijuana, including for religious purposes.

### **Government Practices**

Rastafarians continued to report that law enforcement officials unfairly targeted them for religious reasons, but it was not clear whether the reported discrimination was based on religious belief or was due to the group's alleged illegal use of marijuana as part of their religious practice.

A Rastafarian group, the Church of Haile Selassie I, was granted religious incorporation after having applied for incorporation without success for the past 15 years. Some parliamentarians had previously maintained that parliament should continue to deny incorporation because church members used marijuana in religious services.

### **Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom**

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Rastafarians stated that elements of their religious observance, such as wearing dreadlocks and smoking marijuana, presented serious barriers to their ability to find employment and achieve professional status in the official economy. While some Rastafarians stated that the overwhelmingly Christian population discriminated against them, others, including a prominent Rastafarian leader, said such discrimination has diminished considerably in recent years.

Local media outlets continued to provide a forum for extensive, open coverage and debate on religious matters. Muslim and Jewish groups reported society was tolerant of religious diversity.

### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy**

The U.S. embassy engaged with and encouraged dialogue among religious groups, including Christians, Muslims, Jews, and Rastafarians, as part of its overall efforts to promote religious freedom. The Ambassador and other embassy officers

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included references to religious freedom and tolerance in speeches and other official communications.